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## A Look Back: Navy Medicine in 1915

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[NO COMMENTS]

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In 1915, the Navy Medical Department remained a small peacetime organization consisting of 31 active duty dentists, 1,584 corpsmen, 24 pharmacists, 148 nurses, and 327 physicians.


The year 1915 saw the hopes of a short war in Europe crushed by further entrenchment, weaponization of poison gas and Germany’s policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. Although the United States would remain neutral throughout the year, the loss of the Cunard liner *Lusitania* along with 124 American lives in May would help change that. On the homefront, the year saw the first long-distance (transcontinental) telephone call made between New York and San Francisco (January); in Mississippi, public health researcher Dr. Joseph Goldberger would unlock the mystery of the nutritional disease Pellagra (February). The year also was marked by the release of Charlie Chaplin’s *The Tramp* and D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, two films that would further elevate the still young medium into a reputable art form. In sports, the Boston Red Sox would beat the Philadelphia Phillies in the Fall Classic four games to one; this sporting event would mark the only time in history that two home run record holders (Gavvy McGrath and Babe Ruth) would play against each other. Literature was marked by birth of its newest genre World War I poetry; one of the most famous trench poems, *In Flanders Field* would be published that year. Other notable works of literature that year include Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*. Playwright Arthur Miller, singers Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday, actor-director Orson Welles, and author Herman Wouk were all born in 1915.

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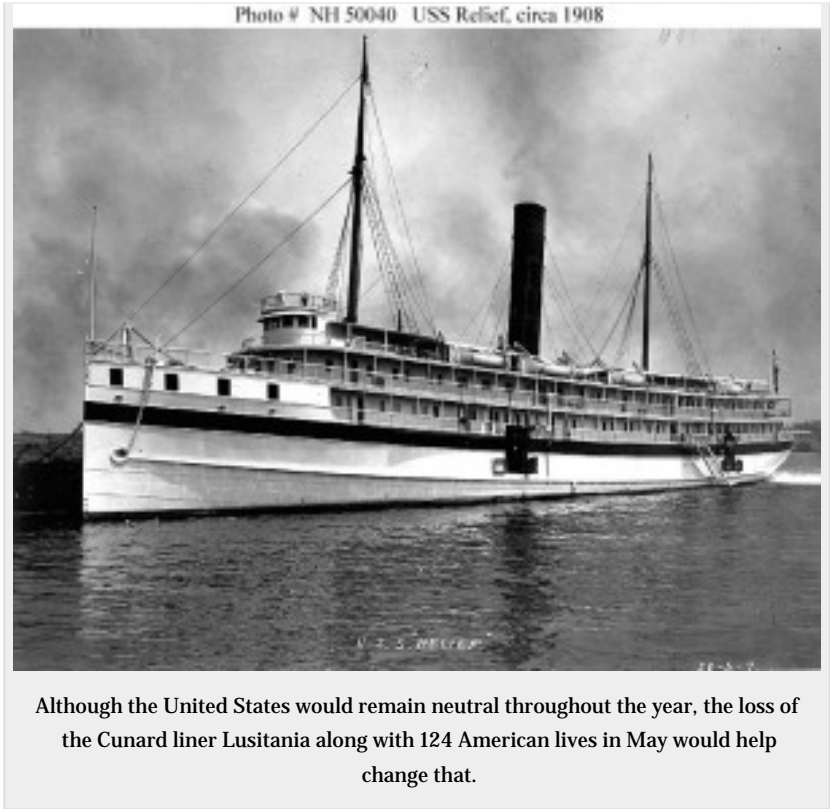
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[January 2015 \(6\)](#)

[December 2014 \(17\)](#)

[November 2014 \(11\)](#)

[October 2014 \(15\)](#)



Navy Medical Department in 1915

In 1915, the [Navy Medical Department](#) remained a small peacetime organization consisting of 31 active duty dentists, 1,584 corpsmen, 24 pharmacists, 148 nurses, and 327 physicians;<sup>[1]</sup> the medical reserve force (not yet opened to nurses, or Corpsmen) included 150 physicians. The Navy operated 19 hospitals stateside and abroad in Annapolis, Md., Brooklyn, N.Y., Cañacao, P.I., Chelsea, Mass., Great Lakes, Ill., Guam, Guantanamo Bay (Cuba), Las Animas, Colo., Mare Island, Calif., Narragansett Bay, R.I., Norfolk, Va., Olongapo, P.I., Philadelphia, Pa., Port Royal, S.C., Portsmouth, N.H., Puget Sound, Wash., Tutuila (America Samoa), Washington, D.C. and Yokohama (Japan). The 20-year old USS *Solace* was the only hospital ship still in commission.

Leading Cause of Death and Illness



September 2014 (20)

August 2014 (14)

July 2014 (13)

June 2014 (8)

May 2014 (11)

April 2014 (9)

March 2014 (14)

February 2014 (7)

January 2014 (7)

December 2013 (7)

November 2013 (12)

October 2013 (7)

September 2013 (14)

August 2013 (13)

July 2013 (11)

June 2013 (22)

May 2013 (15)

April 2013 (14)

March 2013 (14)

February 2013 (14)

January 2013 (12)

December 2012 (11)

November 2012 (11)

October 2012 (7)

September 2012 (9)

August 2012 (12)

July 2012 (13)

June 2012 (17)

May 2012 (22)

April 2012 (14)

March 2012 (13)

February 2012 (14)

January 2012 (13)

December 2011 (13)

November 2011 (20)

October 2011 (22)

September 2011 (12)

Sixty eight percent of the deaths by burns were the result of boiler explosions aboard USS San Diego (ACR-6) and USS Decatur (DD-5).

August 2011 (16)
July 2011 (10)

In 1915, the leading causes of death for Navy and Marine Corps personnel were: Drowning (42), Tuberculosis (36), Pneumonia (22), Burns (16) and Gunshot wounds (13).[2] This was the third year in a row that drowning was the leading cause of death in the Navy. Sixty eight percent of the deaths by burns were the result of boiler explosions aboard [USS San Diego \(ACR-6\)](#) and [USS Decatur \(DD-5\)](#). Tuberculosis and syphilis would account for the greatest number of sick days for Navy and Marine personnel in 1915, 71, 360 and 65, 682, respectively.

**Occupation of Haiti and Santo Domingo**

The combine civil unrest and fear of German occupation lead to the beginning of the U.S. military police action on the island of Hispaniola. The Navy and Marine Corps would remain for the next 19 years in a period often referred to as the [U.S. Occupation of Haiti \(1915-1934\)](#). The Marine Corps Expeditionary Force supported by the Navy Medical Department would be responsible for restoring and preserving order. During these years U.S. Navy medical personnel would help establish the National d'Hygiene Publique and oversee sanitation and disease prevention by supervising the control of the mosquito population through drainage of the low lying areas, establishing quarantine facilities, and providing front line medical care.

**The First U.S. Navy Submarine Disaster**



In his report of the recovery effort, Surgeon William Seaman, USN, would recommend that all naval personnel (especially those serving aboard submarines) wear aluminum identifications (i.e., “dog tags”).

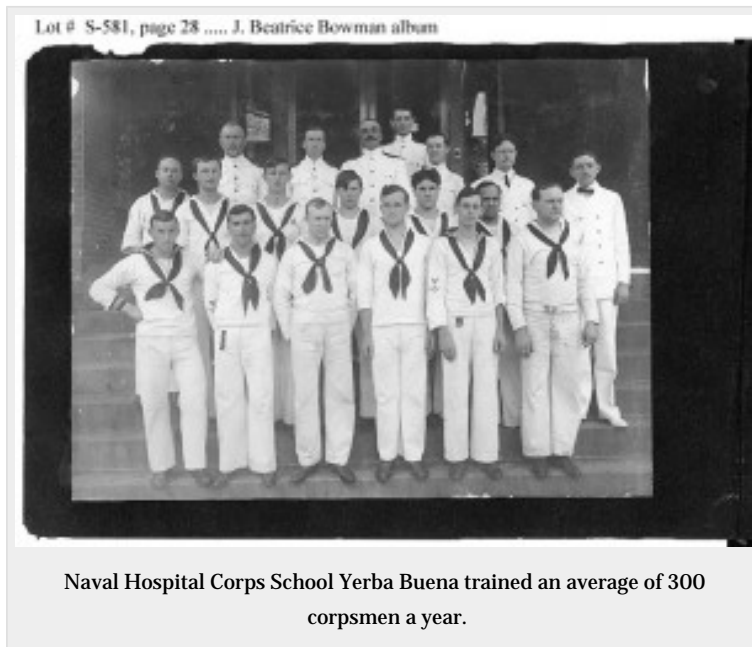
On March 25, 1915, during a routine dive a off Honolulu, the submarine [USS F-4](#) sank in 51 fathoms of water, with the loss of her 21 crewmembers. Naval medical personnel stationed at Naval Hospital Pearl Harbor would help oversee the recovery effort as well as the

identification and disposition of the remains. In his report of the recovery effort, Surgeon William Seaman, USN, would recommend that all naval personnel (especially those serving aboard submarines) wear aluminum identifications (i.e., “dog tags”) around their ankles and that the heels of all Sailors’ shoes be marked with their initials.[3]

### **First Navy physician in World War I**

In April 1915, Navy Surgeon Archibald Fauntleroy sailed to France to study the medical advances of the Great War. His 146-page *Report on the Medico-Military Aspects of the European War* [4] would become one of the first sources on medical lessons of trench warfare, feeding wounded, disposal of arms and ammunition, use of motor vehicles and transporting wounded at the front.

### **The Hospital Corps Lands on Goat Hill**

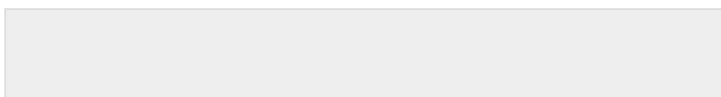


In February 1915, the Navy established its new Hospital Corps School outside of San Francisco on Yerba Buena Island, Calif. (sometimes referred to as “Goat Hill” as “Hospital Corps School San Francisco, Calif.”) Like its counterpart in Newport, Naval Hospital Corps School Yerba Buena trained an average of 300 corpsmen a year in such topics as anatomy, physiology, first aid, field hygiene, sanitation, preventive medicine , pharmacy, chemistry, nursing, and clerical duties. On July 2, 1923 the School relocated to Naval Hospital Mare Island, Calif. where it operated until September 1928 when it transferred to San Diego, Calif.

### **The Spring of Eternal Youth**

In 1915, Navy Surgeon Luther von Wedekind asserts that Ponce De Leon’s Spring of Eternal Youth “lies not hidden in Florida, but bubbles always from aseptic nozzle of the chilled scuttle butt of an American battle ship.” Von Wedekind claimed that the use of distilled water for drinking has helped to eradicate the disease and increased the life-expectancy of humans. According to von Wedekind “overdrinking of water” is a habit that will lead to “agreeable, constant and productive” results.[5]

### **And the Bandsmen Played On (or the Saga of the Stretchermen)**





According to Taylor, Sailors of “certain rating[s]” should be uniformly detailed for duty with the medical department.

Navy Surgeon J.S. Taylor recommends that a “reserve nursing force” is established aboard Navy battleships in order to assist overburdened physicians and Corpsmen. According to Taylor, Sailors of “certain rating[s]” should be uniformly detailed for duty with the medical department at general quarters and trained for dressing wounds and serve in the capacity of bandsmen or stretchermen.[6]

### **Stamping out Tonus in Tutuilla and other medical hits**

Since 1900, when Samoa was ceded to the United States, Naval medical officers assigned there would perform double-duties—attending to military personnel and act as county health officials. In 1915, Navy medical officers would help stamp out elephantiasis, oversee the relief in wake of the devastating tsunami (January), operate a training school for native nurses, and help curb the population of rats.

### **Navy Medical Officer and Presidential Matchmaker**



Future Navy surgeon general, Rear Adm. Cary Grayson, MC, introduced wealthy socialite Edith Galt to President Woodrow Wilson.

In 1915, future Navy surgeon general, Rear Adm. Cary Grayson, MC, whose tenure in the White House extended back to the Theodore Roosevelt Administration 1907, introduced the

wealthy socialite Edith Galt to [President Woodrow Wilson](#). The recently widower-president, who was still grieving the loss of his first wife, immediately to the vivacious Edith and their relationship blossomed. At year's end Wilson and Galt married, marking the second time that a sitting president married in office. After Wilson suffered his massive stroke in October 1919, it has been claimed by many historians that Grayson and Galt (not Vice President Thomas Marshall) were making decisions in the president's stead. [1] *Annual Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Navy Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1915*. Washington, DC. 1915. [2]*Annual Report of the Surgeon General, U.S. Navy Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery to the Secretary of the Navy for the Fiscal Year 1916*. Washington, DC. 1916, p6. [3] Annual Report, 1916. Pp 40-41 and Seaman, William. Report on the Recovery, Identification and Disposition of the Remains of the Crew of the F-4. Vol. 10, No. 1, January 1916. p91 [4] Fauntleroy, Archibald. *Report on the Medico-Military Aspects of the European War: From Observations Taken Behind the Allied Armies in France*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1915. [5] "Naval Surgeon Proclaims Distilled Water as Best Antidote Against Old Age"; *The Washington Post*; Feb 14, 1915; pg M4 [6] Taylor, J.S. "Battleship Ventilation. Permanent Detail of Stretchermen." *Naval Medical Bulletin*, Vol. 9, July 1915, No 3. Pp 532.

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